

*Confessions of a Standstill Runaway:
A Collection of Original Music*

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

By

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Artist's Statement

I didn't give much thought to what I wanted to do for my undergraduate honor's thesis until I had already started working on it. I thought, "Maybe I'll write a story," or "Maybe I'll do a play," and as I was thinking these things, I was playing my guitar and writing some lyrics down. After weeks of stewing over what I "might" do, it finally clicked: I had to write an album.

My songwriting journey truly started when I participated in the immersive learning project *The Liar's Bench*, led by Jennifer Blackmer in the Spring of 2014. Until February of that year, I had only ever played drums and dabbled a bit with writing lyrics for the countless random rock bands I had formed as a teenager. With *The Liar's Bench*, we had to write a musical, and students were challenged to write songs right off the bat. I was terrified and more than a little lost, so I decided that I wanted to pitch in more than random lyrics and few scattered beats. I wanted to learn how to play guitar so I could (in my mind at least) "really contribute." Looking back, I realize that I could have done a great deal whether I learned to play guitar or not, but I am SO thankful I took the plunge. I ended up writing several songs over the course of that semester, songs that ended up in the musical, and songs that I wrote for myself.

I initially wanted to write a concept album on spiritual warfare and the apocalypse, a combination of subjects that had fascinated me since middle school. That didn't pan out though. I had no idea what to write, so I just decided to write whatever I felt like writing in order to better find my "groove." "I Love You More Than..." started as a way of practicing finger style patterns I had developed early in my guitar-playing career. It is a silly love letter to my girlfriend, and only the first verse and chorus are set in stone. The rest of the

lyrics are improv'd every time I perform the song. I love improv and music. I think that song is a neat combination of the two. I initially didn't plan for it to end up on the album, but it did, and I like to think of it as something that uniquely spices up the album.

In the Fall of 2014, I wrote two songs: "Waking Up" and "Boy, Come Home."¹ The melody for "Waking Up" is actually the very first thing I consciously wrote for this project, but the song's lyrics changed quite a bit before the final performance. It started out as a power ballad about looking forward instead of living in the past. Eventually I tweaked the lyrics to come from my Grandfather's point of view during the moment he decided to give up on being depressed about his illness. In many ways, it is still a power ballad about looking forward.

"Boy, Come Home" chronicles a boy's journey from adolescence to adulthood and the strong bond he shares with his father. The song is directly inspired by my own father, Schoch. Dad was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease shortly before my freshman year at Ball State. At first I was terrified that his illness might negatively impact our relationship, but it did the opposite to astounding effect. Our bond is stronger than ever, and I believe "Boy, Come Home" is a strong testament to that. After I wrote the song, I thought more and more about my grandfather, Dorval, and his relationship with my dad. Papaw, as we grandchildren affectionately call him, is an Alzheimer's patient, and he is currently in the late stages of the disease. His illness is a tragedy, but it is also a blessing of sorts. My father always described Papaw as distant and somewhat disinterested in his son's life. The thought seemed impossible to me, as I had always known Papaw as a brilliant, curious, and inspiring man, but I always noticed a rift between Papaw and Dad growing up. However, as

¹ Lyrics for all 9 songs can be found in the 'Appendices' section of this document.

I took a look at the years since Papaw's diagnosis, I noticed that his relationships with those closest to him, including my father, have blossomed. I finally found the inspiration I needed for my creative project. I wanted to write a concept album based on the life of my grandfather.

Work on the project started fast and furious. I made several calls to ask relatives about my grandfather, and I turned to my own memories of him for inspiration. I churned out 3 songs ('Boy, Come Home,' 'Waking Up/Bad Slap,' and 'Fragile Things') over the course of just a couple of weeks. I felt motivated and confident that I would be able to get more than enough done for a few albums' worth of material. That streak did not last long, however, and I soon found myself stuck in the vortex of perpetual writer's block.

I think I felt stuck because whenever I would try to write a song, all I could think of were somber melodies and depressing lyrics about memories I wish I had made, not only with my grandfather, but with Brennen Curtis, a dear friend of mine who died in a car crash in October. I hadn't seen Brennen in almost a decade, but we had planned to reunite once I finished my final Ball State theatre production. He was one of my absolute best friends in middle school, but he moved to Fishers before I entered the 8th grade. Although we mostly fell out of contact after he moved, we would chat every once in a while, and when I moved to college, we made plans to spend a weekend together and catch up. Sadly, he was just as terrible at communication as I was, and we didn't get to follow through with our plans before he died. His death hit me extremely hard, and I found myself lacking the motivation to do anything academic or artistic. I desperately wanted to write a song for him, but only I found myself stuck with an assorted mix of riffs, repetitive chord structures, and half-formed melodies that didn't mesh together in the slightest. I then realized that I might need

to step away from the realities of Papaw's illness and Brennen's death for a bit and try to focus on the more positive elements and memories of my life.

Papaw and I used to talk about space a lot. I was fascinated with the planets when I was a kid, and Papaw was far from lacking when it came to knowledge on the subject. We would talk for hours by the fireplace in his office, and he would give me more science fiction and adventure novels than I could possibly read in my lifetime. Under his tutelage I voraciously read classics like *The War of the Worlds*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *The Invisible Man*. He used to call me his "little bookworm," and we could talk for hours about the books we read and wanted to read. Our shared interest in space and literature provided the inspiration for the next few songs I would write.

The idea for "We Can Be Astronauts/The Moon Song" came at about 3am on a Tuesday evening. I had been in a relationship with my girlfriend, Olivia for about 9 months, and I wanted to write a song for her. The song wouldn't necessarily fit into the album, but I wanted to write it nonetheless. I remember telling her to remind me to write a song about us playing hide-and-seek on the moon. The idea seemed far-fetched and romantic enough to work relatively well, so I set to writing the song the very next day. The melody ended up being a folky finger style progression that sounded a little floaty and mysterious. It made me think of the conversations Papaw and I would have about flying around in space. The lyrics were addressed to Olivia, but I eventually found myself writing to my Mamaw from Papaw's point of view. In a way, the song evolved into a multi-faceted love letter that crossed generations. I decided that it fit in the album after all, and I'm thankful for that decision. It has turned out to be my favorite one of the bunch.

I wrote my next song “Little Bird” over Christmas break. Papaw used to tell me a story about the moment he decided he wanted to become a physician. When he was 10 years old, he built a slingshot from scratch. He was incredibly proud of that slingshot, and he would go out to a certain spot woods near his house every day and use the trees as target practice. He also told me there was a bird that would chirp at him every time he came out to that spot. One day, on a whim, he decided to shoot the bird. Sadly, the bird was killed. Papaw was devastated and swore to never intentionally harm a living thing again. He eventually went on to become an extremely successful and well-loved physician. “Little Bird” sort of retells that story through a series of questions. It took me quite a while to get past the first verse of the song, as I had no idea what trajectory it might take. Eventually it clicked, and I decided to make the song a song of decision.

The next song I wrote ended up also ended up being the album title. I wrote “Confessions of a Standstill Runaway” in one night on my family’s couch in Huntington, WV. Earlier that day, I had spent a couple of hours with my grandparents, and I started to wonder what Papaw’s disease might feel like from the patient’s point of view. I started playing a simple chord progression inspired by “Everlong” by the Foo Fighters, and the lyrics sort of fell into place. It was definitely an easier song to write than most of my other songs. The title is my attempt at being clever and artistic and avoiding using lyrics as a song title. The idea is that Papaw is stuck with a mind that is constantly running away from him. He doesn’t want his mental capacity to fade, but it is out of his control. The lyrics are both a crying out and an attempt to relate to the outside world. I feel as though this song best encompasses the album’s concept, so it became the title.

After writing “We Can Be Astronauts,” “Little Bird,” and “Confessions of a Standstill Runaway,” I entered another long period of writer’s block. Again, I could only come up with unfinished melodies and depressing lyrics. I filled my time with videogames, and I actually think it was a necessary respite. After a couple months, I was able to write again, and my next two songs were written extremely quickly. “Beam Dream” is only a little over a minute long, and it is inspired by the idea of shared memory over the passage of time. The lyrics are inspired by both Brennen and Papaw. I wrote it in about 25 minutes. It’s a simple song, but I’m very proud of it!

I wrote my final song the day before I performed the album for the first time. For a while, the project felt incomplete, and I knew I needed to write something slightly more upbeat and catchy than the rest of my songs. I started playing with some percussive instrumentation on my acoustic guitar, and the structure of the song started to become clear. The song comes lyrically from my point of view, and is directly about my Papaw and the stage of life we are both in right now. “He’s waiting for the man to take him home so he can come back.” Papaw has always been a devout Christian, and he was never scared to talk about death. To this day, he is content with where he believes he will end up after he dies. Although I am terrified at the idea of losing him (“I swear we cannot move him. I’m afraid that we might lose him”), I know that I can do my best to cherish each and every day he is on this Earth with us.

Performing the piece on April 20 was incredibly fulfilling. Many of my closest friends were there, and my Dad came to set up sound and record the whole thing. It sounded fantastic. I felt a great deal of love and support from those who attended. Although Papaw couldn’t be there, and I know he wouldn’t have known what was going on. I know

he'd be proud of me. I love my Papaw dearly, and I am so thankful that he has inspired me in so many ways. This one's for you Papaw!

Lyrics:

1. Beam Dream

Lights go out. Moonbeams hit your face.
Eyes grow dim. Drift on into space.

Come now with me through memory.

Are you with me? Sink in slowly please.
Can you see it? Build it piece by piece.

You're not far-gone. You're here with me.

2. Fragile Things

Can you remember the way we talked to you? Because I'm so afraid that it's not getting through.
Can you remember the way I look at you? Because I'm so afraid that you never do.

And I cry into you.

Do you remember the dreams I shared with you, and all the times we spent reading until two?
Why can't you find all the fates it's brought you to? We are such fragile things. I learned that from you.

And I will try to live for you.

Do you still know me or are you still sleeping?
Has your mind chosen to flee, or will it come back slowly?
Why am I staying just watching you fading away?
So far away?
Please stay.

You don't have to remember. I'll do it for you.

3. Waking Up

Waking up on the wrong side of the right bed and shaking up the thoughts that run through my head.

I'm running...close to jumping.
Sinking....close to screaming.

I've been breaking up the walls I built from bitterness, and I'm catching up to the joy I lost to loneliness.

I'm crawling...no more falling.
Clinging...close to singing.

I see a future that keeps its host from bleeding, its water from running dry.
I yell because I enjoy the screaming, and I rarely wonder why I ever held onto thoughts so dark and draining, they never could let me fly.
My resolve is a life that's not unyielding. I'll climb into the light.

I think I'm taking up...the way I dreamt when I was just a kid.
So I'm fessing up...to leading life better left unled.

I'm leaping...not just sleeping.
Creeping....toward more than dreaming.

I see a future that keeps its host from bleeding, its water from running dry.
I yell because I enjoy the screaming, and I rarely wonder why I ever held onto thoughts so dark and draining, they never could let me fly.
My resolve is a life that's not unyielding. I'll climb into the light.

4. I Love You More Than...

Solidified silly lyrics:

I love you more than Christmas.
I love you more than birthday cake.
It's not the standard kind of cake. You see we're talking about ice cream.
And this is not the ice cream that you can get at the grocery store.
No, this is special ice cream cake that you get at Dairy Queen.

Because I love you more than I can say.
Oh yes, I love you more and more every day.
People may say I'm dumb, but they usually have nothing really nice to say.
Oh I love you!

5. Boy, Come Home

Little boy, 8 years old, falls and skins his knee.
The boy screams. The boy cries. The blood streams, but the tears won't dry, and Daddy takes him home.
Daddy came, and Daddy dried. Daddy knew what the boy couldn't hide, and Daddy brought him home.

Little boy, 12 years old, goes to school with head held low.

The kids scream. The kids lie. The kids push, but the boy won't fight.
 Still Daddy takes him home. He says,
 "Kids will push, and kids will bite. Don't be afraid to stand and fight, and I will take
 you home."

The little boy has grown into a man.
 His knee is scarred, his head held high.
 The boy dreams. The boy thrives. The man believes, but the man still cries, because
 Daddy waits at home.
 Now Daddy can't sleep. Daddy falls. Daddy fights just to stand tall, and Daddy waits
 at home for his boy to come home.

He says, "I need you to hold my hand, to help me stand up when I can't. I have done
 all that I can to give you a home. So come home."

Little boy walks through the door.
 He's grown so tired and so tall.
 The boy breathes. The boy smiles. The boy is home just for a while, and Daddy
 brings him home.
 Daddy sees, and Daddy smiles. Daddy holds him just for a while, and Daddy brings
 him home.

6. Waiting for the Man

He's sitting by the windowsill, waiting for some time to kill, eyes moving like a
 windmill.

The time, well it already came. That man, he's just not the same, but we're not
 looking for someone to blame.

Go tap him on the shoulder. He's stuck there like a boulder.

He's waiting for the man to take him home so he can come back.
 Waiting for his wings and a microphone for when he comes back.

He's going for a little walk.
 It's the only way to make him talk.
 For a time we forget to sulk.

He's spitting out a Bible verse, but it's followed by a curse word.
 It's the strangest thing I've ever heard.

He's waiting for the man to take him home so he can come back.
 Waiting for his wings and a microphone for when he comes back.

And he's coming back pretty soon.
 He won't be in a Cadillac.

His Lincoln will bring him here really soon.

He's waiting for the man to take him home so he can come back.
Waiting for his wings and a microphone for when he comes back.

7. We Can Be Astronauts/The Moon Song

I've been staying up most nights thinking 'bout you.
How would you like to play hide-and-seek on the moon?
We'll hide in a crater, make sure there's enough room for two.
So what do you say? How 'bout we play? Me and you?

We can run. There's no gravity. Take off your shoes.
I bet we could fly. We should try. I know you want you.
We'll pick up some dust, and we'll take it with us. I'll share mine with you.
So what do you say? How 'bout we play? Me and you?

You hide. I'll count real high.
No fight or flight, just finding you tonight.

You hide, I find. You lie, I'll lay right by your side.
If you say jump, you know I will jump for you.
And if you need me I will carry you.

I'll spin you round and round...

8. Little Bird

Did you ever talk to that little bird?
If you did, did it tell you that word?
Before you clipped its wing and brought it to the ground, did hear it breathe out this sound?

Did it say no?
Did you say no?

You've spent so much time wishing that you could have heard the bird screaming out that word.
It's time to breathe and put feet on the ground. You don't have to listen to that sound.

Stop saying no.
Stop screaming no.

No.

9. Confessions of a Standstill Runaway

I can't cry the way I did many moons ago.
I've felt myself slide back to the way I was when I was just 3 years old.

I feel the stitches down my side.
Forget the length of my ancient stride...
And find how it feels to hide.

The gap begins to fill my mind, but who I was lies deep inside.
You don't have to watch me cry.

And I...I lie...
And I....I lie deep inside...

I've watched you cry the way you did many moons ago.
You've had to watch me slide back to the way I was when I just 3 years old.

You've felt the stitches down my side.
You've seen the length of my ancient stride.
And you know how it feels to hide.

You feel the gap that fills my mind, but who I was lies deep inside.
Don't watch me cry.

Cos I...I lie...
Oh I...I'm deep inside.

You know I want you to feel me, so feel me.
You know you want to see me, so see me.
You know I want you to find me, I'm deep inside.

And I...I lie...
Oh I...I'm deep inside...

I'm deep inside...